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# AN EFFORT TO STANDARDIZE DESCRIPTIVE THEME- WRITING FOR THE SENIOR YEAR OF THE HIGH SCHOOL

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## THE PURPOSE AND METHOD OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the present investigation was to secure a number of themes which could be accepted by teachers of English in high schools as standards or norms. These themes were to be collected from representative high schools and written by students as regular class assignments. An effort was made to secure representative, original work, and the themes collected included writing of all grades of excellence. The particular type of composition used was selected as a result of an elimination process rather than any special desire to use descriptive themes. After conferring with some teachers of English in high schools, it was decided that, to be of greatest value, the standards secured should represent a very definite sort of writing, and that the themes should all be done by students of the same year in high school. The English courses of several high schools were examined and it was found that there was practically no uniformity as to the particular one of the four divisions of rhetoric emphasized in any one year of the course. In one high school, description was emphasized in the first year; exposition, in the second; narration, in the third; and argumentation, not at all. In another the four divisions of rhetoric were entirely disregarded and the students were given a very general training in composition work. In a third the order was again changed, and exposition given in the first year and narration, possibly, in the fourth. At any rate, no two high schools seemed to agree in the order or sort of composition work taught. Under these conditions it was decided to use the work of fourth-year students, as they had had training, at least some time in their course, in each of the

established divisions of composition work. It was then necessary to decide upon the kind of theme to use. All high schools consulted gave at one time or another special training in narration and description. Of these two divisions it was thought that for various reasons descriptive themes were better to be used. Narrations are not so easily limited in length and admit of too great a variety of theme. After it was decided to use descriptive themes, a still further limitation seemed necessary in order to secure a uniform type, as there are, of course, many sorts of descriptions. So the final request that was sent to the teachers from whom the themes were secured asked for themes descriptive in character and written by fourth-year students. These themes were to be descriptive of fields, lakes, seas, streets, and the like and to contain no mention of human characters. They were to depict such scenes as an artist might sketch into a landscape or marine. It was also especially requested that the themes represent the best original work possible by these students. The length of the themes was specified as "a page or two of ordinary theme paper."

The four high schools which furnished the themes represent typical American high schools. One of these is a school whose enrolment is something over one thousand students and whose faculty contains about sixty teachers. Another is a university high school, in which the work done is of a more specialized kind and with a limited number of students. A third is a small high school whose faculty consists in all of about eight teachers. These three schools are in a Middle Western state. The fourth school which contributed themes is one with about five hundred students in an eastern state. A number of themes were sent in from each of these schools, but some of them had to be rejected finally because they were too long, too short, or otherwise not as requested. Of all the themes collected, thirty were retained. These were typed and mimeographed exactly as the pupils had written them with the exception of the indorsement on each theme, which consisted of the student's name, his age, and his school. The distinct problem of handwriting was therefore eliminated.

The persons asked to judge the themes were selected, for the most part, from the membership list of the National Council of

Teachers of English. In addition to this list there were included also some half-dozen or so teachers whom the author knew to be interested in such an investigation. The judges included teachers of English from various states and of various ranks. Among them were professors of English in large universities, teachers in normal schools, teachers in private secondary schools, and teachers in public high schools.

When a sufficient number of persons had consented to assist in the work by criticizing and judging the samples, a package containing the thirty prepared themes was sent to each. The themes were passed upon by forty judges.

The following directions were given to each of the judges:

1. Arrange the thirty themes in the order of their merit and number them in order. If any two or more of them seem to you to be of equal merit, then number them with the same number. Your scale, then, may run in some such manner as this: 1; 2; 3, 3; 4; 5, 5; etc., instead of from 1 to 30 consecutively.

2. Write on the back of each theme your opinion of (1) the merits of the theme, (2) the defects of the theme, and (3) the reasons why any one theme is better than the one just after it or poorer than the one just before it in the scale.

3. Grade each theme numerically. In determining merit, please consider both mechanical form, such as: spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing, sentence structure, word agreement, etc., and also content, such as: imagination, originality, literary excellence, etc.

It was thought that a very necessary part of the work of the judges was secured by the second of these directions. A teacher might have any number of model themes with which to compare those written by his own students, and still his comparison might be merely a matter of taste or personal opinion unless definite reasons were given for the excellence or inferiority of the model themes. Direction 3 was interesting in so far as it gave evidence of the wide variation in the matter of numerical grades which exists among teachers.

#### THE FINAL RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The results of the judging placed the following twelve themes as the best twelve of the series. They are here reproduced in their order of excellence just as written by the students and passed upon by the judges, together with the average grades which were

given them. Following each of the themes are three paragraphs, which are careful résumés of the comments offered by the judges. The judges varied considerably in the marks given the themes and in the place assigned to each in the scale, but they were quite uniform in their statements of merits and defects. It might be of interest to note that the theme which won first place was written by a boy aged nineteen years; the second best, by a girl aged seventeen years; the third best, by a boy aged nineteen years; the fourth in rank, by a girl aged sixteen years; the fifth, by a girl aged seventeen years; the sixth, by a girl aged eighteen years; the seventh, by a girl aged eighteen years; the eighth, by a girl aged nineteen years; the ninth, by a girl aged nineteen years; the tenth, by a girl aged eighteen years; the eleventh, by a girl aged seventeen years; and the twelfth, by a girl aged nineteen years. The most of the winning themes were, therefore, written by girls, but the best of all and the third best were written by boys.

These themes are proposed, then, to serve as standards in descriptive theme-writing for the Senior year of the high school.

Theme No. 16

Grade 9½ per cent

#### THE ABANDONED FARMHOUSE

I broke through the last thicket of underbrush and advanced into the clearing. Before me, overshadowed on three sides by the dense woods, stood the crumbling buildings of an abandoned farm. The little house, rising from the tangled mass of vines and shrubs, was of a dull gray color. The faded green shutters of the one visible window hung drunkenly across the broken sash. A wild ivy vine had clambered up the porch post and covered the roof with its thick foliage. A huge poke berry weed grew through a broken board on the porch. A sagging wooden trough lead from the eaves to a rainbarrel almost hidden by weeds. What had once been the garden was now a wild tangle of weeds and vines. The picket fence which enclosed it, had sagged from the posts. Vines interlaced their tendrils through the pickets. In the corner farthest from the house, a single holly hock stalk rose like a sentinel above the tangled mass at its feet. It was the only survivor of the past garden. The roof of the little stable sagged deeply. The doors had been hurled from their rollers and boards had dropped from the sides and the tumbling stalls could be seen through the apertures. An overwhelming feeling of loneliness swept over me. The whole scene was suggestive of some human tragedy. My imagination swept back to the time when the little farm must have been a scene of lively enterprise. But the life was now gone, I knew not where, and nature was doing her best to erase the last vestige of man's work.

*Merits.*—This theme possesses some real literary value; it is interesting, simple, natural, and unpretentious; it contains genuine feeling and a pleasing personal interest. As a description it contains rather excellent imagination and gives to the reader a clear, coherent picture. The point of view is well determined (line 2). Such details as “rain-barrel hidden by weeds,” “single hollyhock stalk,” “huge pokeberry weed” are nicely chosen. The details are logically arranged. The opening sentence is arresting [18]<sup>1</sup> and the concluding sentence is appropriate and pleasing [15].<sup>1</sup>

*Defects.*—There is an unpleasant sameness of sentence structure in this theme [30],<sup>1</sup> especially an overuse of short sentences, which give a sense of haste out of harmony with the subject [12].<sup>1</sup> Five words are misspelled: faded, rain-barrel, survivor, loneliness, and hollyhock.

*Comparison.*—This theme is much more effective than theme No. 21 because it is not so pretentious and does not make so conscious an effort to be literary.

Theme No. 21

Grade 89 per cent

#### IN FROZEN SEAS

Cold blue waters lapped unceasingly at the feet of great icy crags. Myriads of stars sparkled in the vast dome of Heaven, reflected in the expressionless blue expanse below. Massive white bodies peered from the dark depths and floated slowly southward. Wild torrents of water had been stayed by Nature in their rushing course o'er dizzy cliffs, and now lay white and still in wondrous shapes against the rock. Glistening snow partly covered, yet enhanced the motionless beauty of this polar art. Above and over all played those brilliant, mysterious lights of the North. Cold pinks deepening into reds, dazzling sea-greens, electric blues flashed back and forth charging the crystal air and challenging the great sheets of ice. Ever they leapt, darted, and flamed against the starry sky. Over the topmost shimmering point of a great jagged body of ice appeared a large shaggy, white body that lumbered slowly down to the deep waters. With a plunge it entered the icy sea, turned the heavy head toward the heart of the charging lights, and swam to the northward.

*Merits.*—This theme presents very good imagination [25] and a rather rich vocabulary [28]. It contains an especially good choice of descriptive terms, such as “cold,” “electric,” “lumbered,”

<sup>1</sup> The numbers within the brackets indicate the number of judges making the same criticism.

and "challenging" [20]. The sentences are agreeably varied in structure.

*Defects.*—The most objectionable feature of this theme is its attempt to be literary [15]. The style is pretentious, hackneyed, and grand, as illustrated in the use of such terms as "o'er," "vast dome of Heaven," and "polar art." The spelling of "leaped" is faulty. There is a disagreeable repetition of the word "body" in line 12. The word "peered" in line 3 is misused. The theme ends abruptly [12].

*Comparison.*—Less genuine and natural than theme No. 16.

Theme No. 15

Grade  $87\frac{1}{2}$  per cent

#### A RAIN STORM IN THE ROCKIES

Black rolling clouds thundered up the valley lit up by vivid cutting flashes of lightning. Horses and cattled turned 'back to' the oncoming storm and here and there a lone horsemen could be seen galloping to sheltered spots. The storm broke quick and hard flooding the valley and small tributary streams to their banks. The sky was black with occasionally a low grey cloud blown swiftly across its dark under surface. Surrounded by mountains the valley became dark as night. The dry creek beds high up in the mountains were now filled and dozens of tiny silver thread-like streamers dashed over precipices forming fairy like water falls which faded into mist and darkness as they fell. Suddenly a dazzling brilliant golden light shot thru the notch in the mountains made by the valley and flooded the under side of the black clouds, which seemed to form a blanket over the world, with radiant golden light. Bright streamers shot out like fingers into the inky sky lighting up the deep valley far down towards the plains. Here sky and earth seemed to meet and absorb all in darkness. Myraids of golden sprays covered the canyon walls, to fall as if into a mould out of sight in the wooded bottom. Scarlet and crimson lights, formed by the sun as it sank behind a ridge, left the valley and eastern mountains clothed in a soft purple light.

*Merits.*—A rather difficult [12] subject is here well treated. The theme contains good imagination [12] and gives a clear picture [30]. One feels, on reading this theme, that the description is original and that the author himself was interested in his subject [10].

*Defects.*—There are some mechanical errors, such as the faulty spelling of "myriads" and "lightning" and an omission of commas in lines 2, 6, and 13. There is a slight tendency to be wordy, as in the use of both "brilliant" and "dazzling" in line 10, and in the

sentence beginning in line 15. The word "blanket" as used in line 12 is hackneyed. The structure of sentences 2 and 7 is faulty. The point of view of the description is not determined.

*Comparison.*—The theme is less coherent than No. 21 because of the indeterminate point of view.

Theme No. 28

Grade 87½ per cent

#### THE APPROACH OF NIGHT

The broad, steely lake lay placid in the twilight; long rows of grim black poplars cast wavering shadows across its calm surface. Reeds bent their stately heads that they might drink of its sweetness, and the hidden bull-frog croaked in utter contentment. Down, with the silent current, a small boat drifted; down, down—until, moored in a bed of pond-lilies, it came to rest. Directly above it the glittering evening star twinkled into sight, flashed uncertainly for a moment, then remained steady; its reflection glinted on the oar-lock then slanted into the liquid depths,—making the one golden shaft in this mass of dusk; and the silent, inky heavens seemed, like the Cyclops, to watch with one clear eye—for the welfare of the little world below.

*Merits.*—This theme has a stately, polished, artistic style [21]. The same mood is well sustained throughout the theme [13]. The vocabulary is good. The theme possesses excellent unity and coherence [18]. Mechanically, the theme is very good. The classical reference in line 9 is appropriate and pleasing [26].

*Defects.*—There is an inconsistency between the shadows mentioned in line 2 and the "inky" darkness mentioned in line 9.

*Comparison.*—The literary style of this theme and the sentence structure place it ahead of theme No. 20.

Theme No. 20

Grade 85 per cent

#### THE FORSAKEN HOUSE

To reach the old forsaken house one must go by a path now almost obliterated by weeds and briars. The rustle of the crisp leaves under one's feet was pleasant to hear, mingled with the cheerful chirp of the birds which sat singing in the trees, that made an archway over the path. At last the winding path ended at the rude snake-fence, which enclosed the yard now overgrown with weeds and bushes. Indeed it reminded one of a miniature thicket.

The old house was in the last stage of decay. The roof long ago covered with lichens had fallen in, and the old crumbling brick walls were overgrown with ivy and wild clematis. The door-sill had entirely rotted away, while the door sagged on its hinges, setting up a dismal moan, whenever the wind



banged it to and fro. On the right hand side of the house, was an old-fashioned well, whose sweep now and then touched the branches of the weeping willow tree, that shaded it, causing them to scrape against the walls. As the shadows of evening lengthened, one could hear the croaking of the frogs in the nearby swamp and the mournful cry of the whip poor will mingled with the hoot of the owl. Indeed, this was a lonely and weird place to be by ones self, even early in the evening.

*Merits.*—Good paragraphing [5]; a rather good handling of details, such as “rude snake-fence,” “old-fashioned well” [20]; and a rather well-established point of view in lines 1 and 5. An appropriate atmosphere of loneliness is present in the theme [17].

*Defects.*—The most prominent defect is the faulty structure of sentence 2 and the weak, awkward, and ungrammatical concluding sentence. There is too long an introduction for so short a theme [10]. The use of “nearby” as an adjective in line 21 is bad [12].

*Comparison.*—The style of this theme is inferior to that of theme No. 28. The vocabulary and style are better, however, than than those of theme No. 17.

Theme No. 17

Grade 84½ per cent

#### NATURE IN AUTUMN

We climbed up, up, up, and at last we reached a large flat stone. There our guide told us to halt and to look back. What a beautiful scene! How wonderful nature is! So many colors—red, green, yellow, brown,—and yet so harmonious! At no time is a scene more beautiful than in autumn. The narrow, winding path over which we had just traveled in single file could only be seen in a few places, most of it was hidden from view. As we looked down over the tops of thousands of trees with their beautifully colored leaves, into the valley below, we saw, as we never did before, how beautiful and wonderful nature really is. Far in the distance a lake could be seen. Part of it glistened like spangles in the sun, while the other part looked black as night because of the reflection of the surrounding mountains which rose from its depths and towered high above it. We stood and enjoyed this beautiful scene for a long time and were afraid to move lest we should break the deep solemn silence which prevailed.

*Merits.*—Pleasing and direct [18]. A good point of view well established and stated in sentence 1 [20]. The sentences are varied and the picture is clearly presented [18].

*Defects.*—Too exclamatory [33]. A limited vocabulary, especially in synonyms for the expression of beauty [25]. Sentence 4 is superfluous and mars the unity of the theme [15]. Sentence 8 is poorly constructed [12]. The word “only” in line 5 is misplaced. Redundancy occurs in line 6.

*Comparison.*—Somewhat less natural and easy than theme No. 20. The entire description is somewhat trite.

Theme No. 14

Grade 84 per cent

#### THE DESERTED FARM HOUSE

Lonely and forsaken, it now stands there, a remnant of what it was fifteen years ago. It is still on the side of Brinkwood hill but not so near the summit as it was those years back for the hill has experienced great transformation through the building of the new road. The road has left the old homestead in the background. The little log house with its traces of whitewash here and there and the narrow stone-walk from the house to the gate, I contrasted in my mind with the one fifteen years before. Between the small gray stones, a few small red moss roses were growing, which gave me a distinct remembrance of the round, stone encircled flower bed, at the rear of the house. The initials J. T. still stood out plainly on the kitchen window-sill and I remembered distinctly the scolding I had got for putting them there. I peeked in at the window and spied the dear old red brick fire-place whose warmth had thawed out my frozen feet more than once. Something suddenly touched my heart and for a moment, I felt alone in the world.

At evening time as the milkhawlers pass the old house, the old house gives one an entirely different feeling. The empty windows, the singing of the frogs, and the whistle of the whip poor will, all together in the dewy air give the house a spooky appearance.

*Merits.*—There is a well-given and natural sense of intimacy about this theme which one likes [25]. The details, such as the “red moss roses” and initials, “J. T.” are well chosen. The feeling is sincere and pleasing and the theme is effective in arousing emotion [6].

*Defects.*—This theme lacks unity because of no established point of view [30]. The last paragraph is weak and seems to break the mood established in paragraph 1 [7]. Commas are omitted in lines 3, 10, and 12. Repetitions in lines 7–8 and 15 are objectionable. In line 8 “which” has no noun antecedent. “Milkhauers” is misspelled. The theme does not maintain the same tense and person throughout.

*Comparison.*—In mood and structure this theme is less unified than theme No. 17.

Theme No. 29

Grade  $83\frac{1}{2}$  per cent

#### A PENT UP TEAR

Caught in an unfathomable chalice formed by high jaggy cliffs is a tear from above. This tear was formed, beyond a doubt, when the Heavens were feeling their bluest. The sky has changed many times since this tear fell, sometimes it has been bright and cheerful, othertimes sad and cloudy, but not so with the tear drop. From early morn to evening, and from evening to morn it retains the same icy blueness. The sun upon it serves only to make it appear more cold, while when overshadowed by threatening clouds it becomes more repulsive, more mysterious. The high jagged cliffs are mirrored in its depths on all sides tending to increase the distance to its unknown bottom. Surrounding the cliffs which form the chalice is another circle of cliffs and precipices. These rocky formations continue outward becoming larger and higher, until the last to be seen are completely covered with snow, and lost in the clouds. So an unsurpassable barrier is formed that the tear drop may never escape from its unfathomable chalice formed by high jaggy cliffs.

*Merits.*—The metaphor is very well carried out [30]; the imagination is good [25]; the theme is coherent [20]; and the sentence structure is varied and pleasing.

*Defects.*—Probably a trifle too fanciful [6]. The pun in line 3 is poor. In lines 1 and 14 "jaggy" is used for "jagged." Punctuation is bad in lines 5 and 12.

*Comparison.*—The imagination and originality of this theme place it above theme No. 11.

Theme No. 11

Grade  $82\frac{1}{2}$  per cent

#### A MORNING IN EARLY SPRING

I stood on a comparatively high hill and gazed at the surrounding country. It was early spring. The earth was carpeted with a soft, green turf, which was sprinkled with gleaming dew drops which sparkled like diamonds in the morning sun which was just peeping over the dim, far-away hills. The lake in the distance looked hazy until the sun came farther up and made a path of gold from shore to shore. At the foot of the hill on which I stood, ran a little brook which trickled over the moss-covered rocks. Here and there quiet farms lay scattered in the landscape. On the soft, green meadows, cattle browsed, and the white wooly sheep nibbled the tender grasses. The branches of the tall,

stately trees were covered with soft, green foliage and were swayed back and forth by the gentle wind. Now and then a bird flew from the top of one of these majestic trees and flew higher and higher until it became a mere dot and finally was lost in the blue heavens.

*Merits.*—There are few mechanical errors in this theme. There is a good opening sentence and an excellent adherence to the established point of view [10]. There is originality [8] and good imagination [6]. The theme manifests genuine feeling [10].

*Defects.*—The structure of the third sentence is especially poor [20]. There is objectionable repetition of the word “flew” in the last sentence [18]. There are presented too many details for a clear picture [10]. The theme seems overloaded with adjectives such as “blue” (line 13), “majestic” (line 12), “green” (line 10), and “white” (line 9). “Woolly” is misspelled in line 9.

*Comparison.*—The theme contains less originality than theme No. 29, but it is perhaps more genuine than theme No. 12.

Theme No. 12

Grade 8½ per cent

#### A WONDERFUL NIGHT

It was a wonderful night. And as I lay in the swing upon the back-porch I could not help but think of the beauty and wonder of it all. Everything was perfectly still except for the sweet strains of music coming from some-where off over the lake, and the lap, lap, lap, of the waters upon the sandy shore. As I opened my eyes, I looked up into the beautiful heaven just filled with the pretty little twinkling stars, and the big old moon looked down upon me and made me think of that little song, “the moon has his eyes on you, so be careful of what you do.” My gaze then wandered off to the opposite shore, which was then just a mere shadow with here and there little bright lights flickering from among the shadowy trees. The lake was sublime, the reflection of the moon upon it made what looked like a beautiful golden path all the way across; the little ripples you could see and the coloring and all just made you think loveland.

*Merits.*—This theme has a very distinct tone, and the personality presented excites curiosity [20]. There are few mechanical errors. The point of view is good and the order of details is logical [15].

*Defects.*—The theme is perhaps too sentimental. There is an objectionable change of the person of the pronoun from line 1

to line 12. Poetry is quoted as though it were prose, and the quotation is not begun with a capital letter.

NOTE.—The comments on this theme were very interesting. The criticisms were quite decided but not in agreement. Many of the judges claimed for the theme a simple effective naturalness, asserting it to be the truthful expression of a normal adolescent with a pleasing, naïve personality. Others disliked the personality of the writer, claiming for her a shallow sentimentality, which reflected a fondness for mawkish songs and stories. That which some of the judges called naturalness, others called sentimentality. There seems to be a transition in the mood of the description, which some of the judges called a passing from awe or sublimity to gushiness or ridiculousness.

Perhaps the fact that the composition aroused curiosity and drew out such decided criticisms because of its unique tone of personality should be considered a very great merit.

Theme No. 27

Grade 81 per cent

#### A RAINY DAY IN THE COUNTRY

One rainy afternoon I was sitting on the porch of my grandfather's house, listening to the rain falling upon the house roof. After a continuous dry and sultry spell the rain seemed to sweeten and purify the air. The clouds were lying in high horizontal bands together with light and feathery clouds which is known as a combination of the cirrus-nimbus clouds. The rain fell in a steady downpour forming much run-off water, which caused the streams to be greatly

swollen. The grass seemed <sup>to</sup> freshen and look green again while the flowers seemed to straighten up and face the world again. The cows showed their appreciation by standing in their sheds, contentedly chewing their coods, while the horses ran to an fro letting the drops of rain fall upon their heated backs. The chickens waded around through the rain with drooping tails and the roosters crowed in response to the crowing from the other side of the hill. The ducks were swimming in the pond seemingly unconscious of the rain falling upon their backs, or of the fact that they might get wet.

Soon the clouds began to scatter leaving patches of blue and white in the sky, and I knew that the rain was then about over. The toads were then hopping about when my little cousin said to me, "See it has rained toads."

*Merits.*—An agreeable, straightforward style [5]. The details are well chosen and logically presented [18]. The personal touch in the anecdote at the conclusion is quite pleasing [10].

*Defects.*—The greatest objection in this theme is the introduction of such scientific terms as “run-off water” and “cirrus-nimbus clouds.” They seem pedantic and artificial [10]. The sentences are monotonous. The third sentence is poorly constructed. In line 9 “cuds” is misspelled. Sentences, 1, 3, and 5 and lines 7 and 16 contain objectionable repetitions. The theme lacks imagination and is perhaps narrative rather than descriptive [15]. The point of view is broken, which break makes the picture confused.

*Comparison.*—Less imagination than theme No. 12.

Theme No. 23

Grade 80 per cent

#### AN EVENING SCENE

Just opposite the hill, “Inandah,” is another hill even more steep than Inandah. There is on the western slopes of Inandah beautiful, rustling, green corn, about half grown, and growing grain, which responds in billowy waves to the gentle touch of the south breezes. Inandah gradually slopes down into a marsh out of which the steep hill opposite arises. However, its eastern slope has a heavy growth of dark green grass which seems to ripple in unison with the long, light green, marsh grass. There are many kinds of small bushes, shrubberies, and creeping vines which seem to mark the dividing line between the lowland and the hill. Here and there on the beautiful slope stands an old oak or Hickory. On the high ridge, which must run for almost forty rods without a break, there towers a grove of lofty maples, oaks, hickories, mulberry, and other species of trees, all of which are more or less intertwined with the ivy and wild grape vines. Just then the big, red sun, sinking in the western

reddish

sky, sends his last lingering rays thru the trees and gives them a soft ^ light which Nature makes blend so well with the greens. For only a brief time may one enjoy this picture; then, all is changed and he wonders if he had had a dream.

*Merits.*—A clear and authentic picture. The theme is mechanically good and it presents a use of well-chosen details [7].

*Defects.*—Unfortunate repetition in sentence 1. The expression “a grove towers” in line 11 is crude [4], and “makes blend” in line 15 is awkward [3]. “Last lingering ray” in line 14 is trite [10]. The word “hickory” in line 10 should not be capitalized. The picture presented is not clear because of a failure to establish a point of view. In line 16 the word “then” is unfortunate in introducing a time element, which the reader does not expect. The

title does not fit the theme well, as the idea of evening is not mentioned before the eighth sentence.

TABLE SHOWING HIGHEST GRADE, LOWEST GRADE, AND AVERAGE GRADE OF EACH OF THE TWELVE THEMES<sup>1</sup>

No. of Theme	Highest Grade	Lowest Grade	Average Grade
11. ....	95 per cent	70 per cent	82½ per cent
12. ....	92	58	81½
14. ....	93	70	84
15. ....	97	75	87½
16. ....	100	80	91½
17. ....	95	68	84½
20. ....	93	70	85
21. ....	99	72	89
23. ....	91	60	80
27. ....	94	65	81
28. ....	98	75	87½
29. ....	95	60	83½

#### SOME COMMENTS ON THE RESULTS OF THE INVESTIGATION

Some comments upon the complete investigation are perhaps appropriate. One might ask whether such judgment as was passed by the persons selected for the present investigation, who were all teachers of English, should be considered final or even reliable. Might it not represent a very conventionalized sort of judgment by a restricted class? Would the judgment have been the same if made by editors or writers, for instance? A further investigation in which a less restricted class of people should act as judges would, no doubt, be very interesting. It is believed, however, that the criticisms received upon these themes were the result of very careful study made by persons who are familiar with the best in literature and who are, at the same time, alert to any modern tendencies in writing.

It was evident that the viewpoint of the judges was one which looked to literary style quite as much as to mechanical correctness. In fact, the greater emphasis seems to have been placed upon the former, and the comments of all the judges were quite similar in their criticisms of the content as well as of the mechanics of the

<sup>1</sup> Tables showing the grading of each theme by all the judges are omitted for lack of space.

writing. These comments, however, did not give the impression of convention but rather of freshness and individuality.

To be sure, many of the expressions used by the judges in criticism of the themes were somewhat abstract, and yet they were probably highly suggestive and symbolic and as exact as possible. Such qualities as literary style, genuineness, originality, effectiveness and the like cannot be reduced to concrete terms and measured as one would measure cloth by the yard. It is no doubt true, however, that, among persons of similar cultivation and literary appreciation, such terms as "mood," "feeling," "atmosphere," etc., have rather definite and common significance when applied to written compositions. It is believed that the very universal acceptance of such expressions justifies their use in such an investigation as the present one. At the best, words are merely symbols, and so to criticize a written composition is necessarily to go one step farther into the use of artificiality and symbolism.